

# Jim Betts brought back to lead Albanese's infrastructure department

**Tom Burton** *Government editor*



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Twice let go from senior state roles, former British Communist Party member, punk rocker and Oxford graduate Jim Betts is to return to the public sector, to lead the mega infrastructure department for the Albanese government.

Mr Betts replaces former Morrison government ministerial adviser Simon Atkinson, who helped establish Infrastructure Australia when Mr Albanese was portfolio minister.



The flamboyant Jim Betts is to take over the mega Infrastructure portfolio.

Mr Atkinson had to defend the toxic car park grants program after the auditor-general slammed his department [<https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/why-car-parks-are->

the-enemy-of-good-government-20210702-p5866u] for failing to effectively manage the fraught \$660 million program.

The new appointment is one of four new departmental secretaries announced by Mr Albanese, three of them women.

As expected, Tokyo ambassador and former climate envoy Jan Adams has been promoted to secretary of the Foreign Affairs portfolio. She replaces Kathryn Campbell who is to take up a senior appointment in the Defence portfolio in an AUKUS-related role. Ms Campbell was a long-term Army reservist rising to the rank of major general.

Treasury veteran Jenny Wilkinson replaces Finance secretary Rosemary Huxtable who is retiring on August 9, as expected. Ms Wilkinson ran the Parliamentary Budget Office for three years till 2020, and has wide-ranging experience at a time when the department is taking on a broader data leadership and digital leadership role [<https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/data-to-drive-design-and-control-of-social-programs-20220604-p5ar3v>].

The flamboyant Mr Betts was let go by NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet last year after he vetoed Mr Bett's appointment as head of the state Premier's department by then Premier Gladys Berejiklian last year.

Appointed to the Victorian public service by then premier Jeff Kennett Mr Bett's colourful style [<https://www.theage.com.au/national/not-just-going-along-for-the-ride-20050808-ge0nkp.html>] shocked some. Mr Betts was appointed CEO of Infrastructure NSW in 2013 and later as the Secretary for NSW Planning, Industry and Environment.

Mr Betts did not hide his displeasure at being terminated by Mr Perrottet, declaring in a late-night message to staff that he had been "fired" and would not "conceal the reality" of his departure behind "weasel words".

He noted he had "form."

"When I left the Victorian Public Service unceremoniously in 2013, I promised myself I would never again fall in love with my department.

"Epic fail on that account I am afraid."

Mr Betts has been working at EY Port Jackson partners. Former Fair Work ombudsman Natalie James has also been brought back from consulting. She has

been appointed from Deloitte as secretary to the employment and work place relations department. Ms James was previously chief counsel for workplace relations.

“I’m honoured to support the government shape its approach to the labour market at this critical juncture as the new Secretary of the new Department of Employment and Workplace Relations,” Ms James said.

Former Industry and Energy secretary David Fredericks has returned to the re-formed Climate and Energy portfolio, leaving Ed Husic’s Industry portfolio without a secretary.

Mr Fredericks, or Freddo as he is widely known in Canberra, previously was appointed head of the Environment and Energy department by the Coalition government. A barrister by training, Mr Fredericks was chief-of-staff to then opposition leader Kim Beazley and worked for former Victorian ALP premier Steve Bracks.

Each of the secretarial roles are five-year appointments.

Also returning as secretary for public sector reform is another former Environment secretary, Gordon de Brouwer. Dr de Brouwer worked closely with new Prime Minister and Cabinet chief Professor Glyn Davis on the landmark Thodey review of the Australian Public Service.

He will be working to Senator Katy Gallagher in her role as Minister for the Public Service. Mr Albanese said Dr Brouwer would lead and implement a wide range of public sector reforms which “will support my commitment to place greater value on the public service and to grow its capability”.



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Dr de Brouwer is the national president of the Institute of Public Administration Australia, the leading professional body for public servants.

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